

Less than normal grass production expected for coming season

How's your grass production going to be now that we have received a lot of moisture this fall and winter?

The grass should definitely grow better this season than last, but are you out of the woods yet?

No! You will probably have less grass production than normal this coming season.

Consider how grass grows. Water, minerals, carbon dioxide and sunlight must be present for the leaves to produce plant food. This food is stored in the roots and used for growth of new roots and leaves. After the growing season is over, the plant food still remaining in the roots is used to start growth the following spring.

During dry years such as last season, not only is plant food production reduced due to lack of water, but a larger number of roots than normal die off reducing the food storage potential for the next season. These root systems must be built back before normal grass production can be expected.

Management, both past and present, will play a very important role in overall grass production for 1978. Speaking in terms of past management, the rancher who has year in and year out maintained good range condition by moderation in grazing intensity, will have more vigorous grass to rely on. His grass will have weathered the drought with the least effect and will show the least reduction in growth this coming season.

On the other hand, the rancher who has taken his

grass down close every year, will be facing substantially reduced production. His highly stressed grass will need to rebuild roots and will have to start growth with less stored food.

reduced herd size last year due to the lack of grass production, remember not to rebuild the herd too fast. Be certain range can safely support the livestock increases made.

1978 season may be more important than many grazers realize. To allow recovery the fastest, the safest way is to graze over an area fairly rapidly and lightly and return later in the season if neces-

sary. By planning now you can enhance the recovery process.

(T.E. Bedell

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No matter what your past management has been you can still increase forage production by managing your grass correctly this year. Giving plants maximum growth opportunities should allow a faster rate of recovery.

Introduced plants, like crested wheatgrass, can withstand more use than most native grasses. An alternative then would be using your seeded pastures first and letting the native grass put on some early growth to help rebuild their root systems. Consider, as another alternative, feeding for a little longer this spring. With reduced grass production you could easily be faced with the choice of feeding longer this spring or starting to feed earlier next fall. Your native grass would benefit most by delaying grazing this spring, and over the long run produce more forage which means more dollars in your pocket.

Ranchers should consider another aspect of management when planning for this grazing season. For those who

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